

The time of your life

Both of my parents passed away this summer. They lived good lives and made it into their 80s, but it was still a shock to lose them so close together. It is a surreal experience to realize that this constant in your life doesn't exist anymore. They were always only a phone call away, even if I didn't make the call perhaps as often as I should have.

Families are complicated, as are relationships with your parents. I remember one of my friends joking that I was still thousands of dollars of therapy away from figuring out why I always seemed to feel like a little kid around my parents. Overall I think I did a pretty good job of keeping in touch with my folks as their health deteriorated over the last few years. However, it is all just so final (religious beliefs aside). They are gone and I can't help but miss them. Going

through their things is a sobering process that causes me to muse about existence. Does life come down to a few objects left behind? I would prefer to think of it as a legacy of memories held by your friends and family.

My mother had a chronic connective tissue disease that slowly altered her body and restricted her mobility. I am sure she was always in some degree of discomfort, but she never complained. I will remember her stoic practicality as she directed the family's business from her recliner in the living room. My jokester father, ever the life of the party, filled every room with good humor even as his dementia progressed. I would like to think that I am a nice mix of practicality and jokester, but that is for others to judge. I can only hope that I have passed some good traits onto my

children and grandchildren and that they hold fond memories of me in their hearts.

I am filled with sadness, which I am assured fades with time, but this experience caused me to reflect on birth, death, and the contributions we make in between. I want to try to make the world a better place in the time I have left. I want to give more of myself and build better relationships with those important to me so that their memories of me are good ones. I want to take better care of my patients and make their lives just a little bit better. I am going to strive to be a better man, husband, father, grandfather, physician, and more as losing my parents so close together has been a wakeup call. It is easy to fall for the illusion of unlimited future days, but this summer has been a stark reminder that time waits for no one. ■

—DRR

KEY CONTACTS: Directory of senior staff

doctors
of bc

Mr Allan Seckel

Chief Executive Officer
604 638-2888; aseckel@doctorsofbc.ca

Ms Marisa Adair

Vice President, Communications and Public Affairs
604 638-2809; madair@doctorsofbc.ca

Mr Jim Aikman

Vice President, Economics, Advocacy, & Negotiations
604 638-2893; jaikman@doctorsofbc.ca

Mr Blake Allenby

Director, Information Technology
604 638-2875; ballenby@doctorsofbc.ca

Dr Sam Bugis

Vice President, Physician & Specialist Practice
604 638-8750; sbugis@doctorsofbc.ca

Dr Andrew Clarke

Vice President, Physician Health
604 398-4301; andrew@physicianhealth.com

Ms Amanda Corcoran

Chief People & Technology Officer
604 638-2812; acorcoran@doctorsofbc.ca

Ms Cathy Cordell

General Counsel
604 638-2822; ccordell@doctorsofbc.ca

Ms Margaret English

Director, Shared Care Committee
604 638-2947; menglish@doctorsofbc.ca

Ms Alana Godin

Director, Community Practice and Quality
250 218-3924; agodin@doctorsofbc.ca

Dr Brenda Hefford

Vice President, Physician Affairs & Community Practice
604 638-7855; bhefford@doctorsofbc.ca

Mr Rob Hulyk

Director, Physician Advocacy
604 638-2883; rhulyk@doctorsofbc.ca

Ms Linda Lemke

Vice President, Engagement & Quality Improvement
604 638-7864; lleemke@doctorsofbc.ca

Mr Adrian Leung

Director, Specialist Services Committee
604 638-2884; aleung@doctorsofbc.ca

Ms Sinden Luciuk

Vice President, Members' Products and Services
604 638-2886; sluciuk@doctorsofbc.ca

Mr Tod MacPherson

Director, Negotiations
604 638-2885
tmacpherson@doctorsofbc.ca

Ms Cindy Myles

Director, Facility Physician Engagement
604 638-2834; cmyles@doctorsofbc.ca

Ms Carol Rimmer

Director, Technology and Operations
604 638-5775; crimmer@doctorsofbc.ca

Mr Paul Straszak

Chief Negotiator
604 638-2869; pstraszak@doctorsofbc.ca

Ms Sarah Vergis

Chief Financial Officer
604 638-2862; svergis@doctorsofbc.ca

Ms Deborah Viccars

Director, Policy & Planning
604 638-7865; dviccars@doctorsofbc.ca

Access to medical records

“Doctor, can I see my chart?” The simple answer is, “Yes.” But it is actually a lot more complicated than that. I recently met with a patient who had a complex medical history, involving numerous specialists over the years. She hoped to seek a medical opinion from the Mayo Clinic for her ongoing unexplained neurological symptoms.

The Mayo Clinic instructed her to obtain all her medical records, past lab work, past consultations, and actual medical images on CD, and to send everything to them within 1 month. They informed her that she would have to repeat each lab test or image that she wasn't able to provide at the Mayo Clinic, at her own cost. Of course, the patient's first step was to immediately make an appointment with her family physician.

Upon reviewing her chart, a few issues appeared. One, she was relatively new to our practice and her previous GP had not sent us her entire medical record, only various parts of it. Second, some of the specialists she had seen did not forward all her labs or imaging to her GP, they only discussed them in their consultation notes. Third, for various reasons, she often had her CT scans done in Vancouver but her

MRIs done in Surrey. To obtain the actual images on CD she would have to go to each hospital and request them, and each request could take up to 7 business days. For a patient who has limited mobility and who does not drive, this is a tremendously difficult task.

This patient's frustration is understandable and I empathize with her situation greatly. Now that I am her family physician, our office has become responsible for her entire medical record. But the records in our office are often incomplete. It should not be such a difficult task for patients to access their own records, given that they are allowed to do so.

The responsibility for knowing your own health history should be shared between you as the patient and your health care provider. Steps *are* being taken to allow patients greater access to their medical records. For example, patients are now able to look up their own laboratory investigations. This increased access allows for

more open conversations about the investigations ordered, but it can also create excessive worry and anxiety for patients. On the other hand, as health care providers, we often have to discuss sensitive, objective findings that may not necessarily align with a patient's point of view. If the patient were to have full access to this information, it could damage the therapeutic relationship.

The issue of patients having access to their own medical records is complex, and I look

forward to seeing how it evolves. But as our medical system moves toward comprehensive, patient-centred care, it is crucial that medical information be more accessible for both patients and providers. ■

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Nutritional & Environmental Influences on Neurodevelopment

December 7, 2019

SFU Harbour Centre
Vancouver

Nutritional and Environmental Influences on Neurodevelopment is a continuing medical education program for health care professionals. This program examines the current evidence for nutritional support of healthy neurodevelopment in children, with a focus on the influences of internal (nutrition; the microbiome) and external (environmental) health.

The material being presented is designed to enhance knowledge of applied nutritional biochemistry and the associated research literature pertaining to neurodevelopmental conditions. Various levels of evidence will be presented for evaluation and discussion, in order to facilitate improved communication with patients regarding health promotion, disease prevention and preferences for treatment.

Information and online registration: www.isom.ca/event/neuro-2019/

This Group Learning program has been certified by the College of Family Physicians of Canada for up to 6.25 Mainpro+ credits